

## Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

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P 271530Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4237

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 3638

EXDIS NOFORN

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PINT, PINS, VS

SUBJECT: REACTION TO PRESIDENT THIEU'S CALL FOR CABINET RESHUFFLE

REF: A) SAIGON 3169 B) SAIGON 3628 C) SAIGON 3629

SUMMARY: INITIAL REACTIONS TO POSSIBILITY OF BROAD PARTICIPATION OF  
OPPOSITION IN A CABINET OF NATIONAL UNION UNDER PM KHIEM LARGELY  
NEGATIVE AS EXPRESSED TO THE EMBASSY BY NUMEROUS LEADING OPPOSITIONIS  
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PERSONALITIES. NEVERTHELESS, OPPOSITIONISTS HAVE BEEN MEETING AND  
PROPOSALS WILL BE DEVELOPED. SEEMS PROBABLE THAT PRINCIPAL STICKING  
POINT ON PART OPPOSITIONISTS MAY BE RETENTION PM KHIEM IN NEW CABINET

MANY ALSO QUESTION SINCERITY OF PRESIDENT THIEU'S DESIRE TO BROADEN  
PARTICIPATION IN HIS GOVERNMENT. OUTLOOK MIXED AND BESET WITH  
DIFFICULTIES BUT NOT COMPLETELY WITHOUT HOPE FOR PROGRESS. END SUMMAR  
Y

1. DR. TRAN VAN DO HAS DESCRIBED FOR US THE MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT  
THIEU AND MODERATE OPPOSITIONISTS REPORTED REF A. DO SAID THIEU  
ACCEPTED THEIR CRITICISM OF HIS GOVERNMENT AND ASKED THEIR ADVICE HOW  
BEST TO PROCEED. THEY ADVISED THIEU TO OPEN A DIALOGUE WITH THE RADIC  
AL  
OPPOSITION IN AN ATTEMPT TO REACH SOME MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND OFFER  
ED

TO ACT AS LIAISON BETWEEN THIEU AND THE OPPOSITION. THIEU APPARENTLY  
AGREED TO THIS PROPOSAL BUT REQUESTED IN ADVANCE A GENERAL OUTLINE

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OF THE DESIRES OF THE OPPOSITION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF HOW BEST TO

PROCEED. THIS LEFT MODERATES IN A QUANDRY, SINCE THEY FELT THEY COULD NOT ADEQUATELY SPEAK FOR THE RADICAL OPPOSITION.

2. BEFORE FURTHER PROGRESS WAS MADE, THIEU ANNOUNCED HE HAD REQUESTED PRIME MINISTER KHIEM TO FORM A NEW CABINET AND TO INVITE ANTI-COMMUNIST NATIONALISTS, NOT PRESENTLY IN THE GOVERNMENT, TO JOIN. DO SAW THIS AS A TACTIC BY THIEU TO HEAD OFF A DEMAND BY THE OPPOSITION FOR A COMPLETE CHANGE IN THE GOVERNMENT, INCLUDING THE PRIME MINISTER. THIS ATTITUDE HAS BEEN MIRRORED EQUALLY OR EVEN MORE STRONGLY BY MEMBERS OF THE REDICAL OPPOSITION.

3. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE PENDING CABINET CHANGE ON MARCH 25 WAS MADE WITHOUT ANY PRIOR NOTIFICATION TO OPPOSITION LEADERS. IT WAS FOLLOWED ON MARCH 26 BY AN AFTERNOON MEETING ATTENDED PRIMARILY BY RADICAL OPPOSITION LEADERS WITH GENERAL NGUYEN CAO KY AT THE TAN SON KHUT VNAF OFFICER'S CLUB. REPRESENTED WERE MILITANT LAWYERS, PRESS FREEDOM MOVEMENT AND PEOPLE'S ANTI-CORRUPTION MOVEMENT. TRAN VAN DO AND DANG VAN SUNG WERE PRESENT IN THEIR ROLE AS LIAISON BETWEEN PRES THIEU AND OPPOSITION. ALSO PRESENT WERE SOME POLITICIANS ASSOCIATED WITH GENERAL KY. NOTABLY ABSENT WERE AN QUANG REPS OR CATHOLIC POLITICAL LEADERS ASSOCIATED WITH FORMER SENATE CHRM NGUYEN VAN HUYEN. WE ARE TOLD THE MEETING STARTED OUT VERY MILITANTLY WITH MANY DEMANDS FOR PRES THIEU'S RESIGNATION. AFTER MUCH DISCUSSION , HOWEVER, A RESOLUTION WAS PRODUCED WHICH CALLED ONLY FOR A CHANGE OF GOVT. THE MEETING ALSO PRODUCED AN ACTION COMMITTEE TO SAVE THE NATION. (REF B).

4. IT IS NOT CLEAR HOW THIS MEETING CAME TO BE GELD UNDER GENERAL KY'S SPONSORSHIP. EMBASSY CONTACTS SUGGEST THAT IT WAS AT KY'S INVITATION. THE OPPOSITION APPARENTLY DEBATED VENUE OF THE MEETING FAIRLY EXTENSIVELY AMONG THEMSELVES BEFORE AGREEING TO MEET WITH KY BUT THE REAL REASON STILL NOT CLEAR.

5. APPARENTLY KY STATED TO THE GROUP THAT, AS AN ACTIVE MILITARY OFFICER, HE COULD NOT PLAY A ROLE IN POLITICS. THUS, HE HAD ASKED THE OPPOSITION LEADERS FOR TEA AND DISCUSSION BUT COULD NOT NIMSELF PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THEIR DECISIONS. MOREOVER, AFTER THEY FORMALIZED THEMSELVES AS AN ORGANIZATION, HE COULD NO LONGER BE THEIR HOST. HE HAD NO INTENTION OF SERVING IN ANY NEW CABINET. REPORTEDLY,

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KY ADDED THAT IF ANYONE THERE HAD ANY IDEAS OF A COUP, THEY SHOULD LEAVE AT ONCE. KY REFUSED TO SIGN THE FINAL RESOLUTION ISSUING FROM THE MEETING TO MAINTAIN HIS "NON-POLITICAL ROLE."

6. BOTH DR. DO AND SENATOR SUNG SAID THEY HAD SEEN KY ON SEVERAL RECENT OCCASIONS, HAVING BEEN URGED TO DO SO BY BUI DIEM. THEY BOTH HAD FOUND KY MUCH "MATURER" THAN IN PREVIOUS YEARS. KY APPARENTLY EXPRESSED HIMSELF TO THEM EXTEMELY STRONGLY AGAINST THE

ADVISABILITY OF ANY COUP ATTEMPT. ACCORDING TO DR. DO, HE ALSO STATED THAT, EVEN IF IT WERE POSSIBLE TO ASSURE AN HONEST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN OCTOBER HE HAD NO AMBITIONS AND WOULD NOT BE A CANDIDATE.

7. ON MARCH 27 DR. DO SENT PRESIDENT THIEU A DOCUMENT WHICH ATTEMPTED TO MEET THIEU'S REQUEST FOR A SCENARIO FOR TALKS WITH THE OPPOSITION (REF C). THIS DOCUMENT IDENTIFIES THREE WEAKNESSES OF THE GOVERNMENT WHICH MUST BE CURED; A LOSS OF CONFIDENCE OF THE PEOPLE IN THE GOVERNMENT, A LOSS OF PRESTIGE INTERNATIONALLY, AND AN "INEFFECTIVE" ADMINISTRATION. THE CURE WHICH IS RECOMMENDED IS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A GOVERNMENT OF "NATIONAL RECONCILIATION" TO UNIFY THE ANTI-COMMUNIST NATIONALISTS. WHILE THE DOCUMENT DOES NOT SPECIFICALLY STATE A REQUIREMENT FOR A NEW PRIME MINISTER, DR. DO CONSIDERS THAT THIS IS IMPLICIT THEREIN.

8. DISCUSSIONS WITH OPPOSITION LEADERS INDICATE REQUIREMENTS FOR MUCH MORE RADICAL CONCESSIONS BY PRESIDENT THIEU THAN CABINET CHANGES UNDER PRIME MINISTER KHIEM WHICH HE APPEARS TO BE CONTEMPLATION. THEY JUSTIFY THEIR HESITATION ON GROUND THAT PRESENT GOVERNMENT IS SO LACKING IN CREDIBILITY THAT IT COULD NOT MEET ESSENTIAL CURRENT TASK OF REESTABLISHING CONFIDENCE AMONG THE PEOPLE. THEY ARGUE THAT THEIR OWN PRESENCE IN SUCH A CABINET WOULD NOT HELP THE NATION BUT WOULD ONLY DESTROY THEIR OWN CREDIBILITY AND MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THEM TO SERVE EFFECTIVELY IN THE FUTURE.

9. THE FOLLOWING POSITIONS, AS EXPRESSED TO EMBOFFS, SHOULD PROBABLY BE REGARDED AS BARGAINING POSITIONS BY THE OPPOSITION BUT NEVERTHELESS REFLECT GENERAL NATURE OF THEIR OPENING DEMANDS.

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10. LOWER HOUSE OPPOSITION LEADER TRAN VAN TUYEN THOUGHT THIEU SHOULD REMAIN IN OFFICE IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY. HE THOUGHT BOTH VICE PRESIDENT HUONG AND SENATOR CHAIRMAN LAM TOO WEAK TO HOLD THINGS TOGETHER. SOMEWHAT ILLOGICALLY. HOWEVER, TUYEN INSISTED THIEU SHOULD SERVE ONLY AS A FIGURE HEAD, DELEGATING HIS POWERS, CIVILIAN AND MILITARY, TO A CABINET OF NATIONAL UNION. PRIME MINISTER KHIEM, HE FELT, WOULD HAVE TO GO.

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ACTION SS-25

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11. FORMER SENATE CHAIRMAN NGUYEN VAN HUYEN SAID HE COULD NOT SERVE IN THE CABINET "UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS." FOR FURTHER DETAILS HE REFERRED EMBOFF TO HIS YOUNGER AND MORE ENERGETIC COLLEAGUE SEN LE CHAU LOC. EARLIER LOC HAD STATED THAT HE COULD AGREE RELUCTANTLY TO PM KHIEM'S RETENTION "FOR CONTINUITY" BUT THAT THIEU WOULD HAVE TO RESIGN AND TURN THE GOVT OVER EITHER TO VP HUONG OR SEN CHRM LAM. LOC URGED "ONE LAST INTERVENTION" BY US TO ACHIEVE THIS RESULT. THEREAFTER, THE VIETNAMESE WOULD WORK OUT THEIR OWN SOLUTIONS. HE WAS DEEPLY DISTURBED BY SUGGESTION SUCH INTERVENTION MIGHT BE OUTSIDE US POLICY.

12. SDA SECY GEN PROF NGUYEN NGOC HUY SAID HE WOULD NOT SERVE UNDER THIEU UNLESS THREE "CORRUPT" GENERALS WERE FIRED, IE, PM KHIEM, CHIEF OF STAFF GEN CAO VAN VIEN AND PRES SPEC ASST LTG DANG VAN QUANG. HUY WAS DEEPLY DISTURBED AND SEEMINGLY NEARLY OVERWHELMED BY DEVELOPING EVENTS IN MR-1 AND MR-2.

13. LONE OPPOSITION FIGURE SO FAR INTERVIEWED WHO HAS EXPRESSED HIMSELF AS WILLING TO SERVE AS REQUIRED WAS REPUBLICAN PARTY LEADER SENATOR TRUONG TIEN DAT, WHO, HOWEVER, HAS NOT BEEN CONTACTED IN CONNECTION WITH THESE NEGOTIATIONS.

14. MODERATE OPPOSITION LEADERS DR. DO AND EX-SENATOR SUNG APPARENTLY AGREE THAT IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO FORM AN ENTIRELY NEW CABINET UNDER A CIVILIAN PM. DR. DO ADDS THAT THE CABINET WOULD HAVE TO HAVE SUBSTANTIAL POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY. HE SAID HE HAD DISCUSSED THIS POINT WITH THE PRESIDENT AND HAD SAID, WHILE HE COULD NOT EXPECT  
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THE PRESIDENT TO SERVE AS A FIGURE HEAD, THIEU WOULD HAVE TO ACCEPT A DEGREE OF AUTONOMY ON THE PART OF THE CABINET. DO FELT THIS WOULD

BE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT WITH REFERENCE TO PERSONNEL CHANGES  
RELATED TO REFORMING THE GOVERNMENT AND CLEANING UP CORRUPTION.

15. NRF CHAIRMAN, SENATOR VU VAN MAU, AND OTHER AN QUANG LEADERS  
HAVE BEEN NOTICEABLY ABSENT FROM SUCH OPPOSITION DISCUSSIONS.  
ASKED IF HE WOULD PARTICIPATE IN A CABINET IN THE GOVERNMENT OF  
PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU UNDER ANY CONCEIVABLE CONDITIONS,  
SENATOR MAU SAID HE WOULD NOT. OTHER LOCAL OBSERVERS ALSO BELIEVE TH  
S  
IS MAU'S TRUE POSITION, TRAN VAN TUYEN FOR EXAMPLE POINTED OUT THAT  
MAU AND THE AN QUANG, GENERALLY, ARE IN A VERY DELICATE POSITION SINCE  
THEY CONSIDER THEMSELVES MEMBERS OF THE THIRD FORCE AND THUS UNABLE  
TO JOIN A UNION OF ANTI-COMMUNIST NATIONALISTS. TUYEN ADDED IN THIS  
CONNECTION, HOWEVER, THAT THE 17 AN QUANG DEPUTIES INCLUDED IN HIS  
LOWER HOUSE OPPOSITION BLOC WOULD, IN FACT, JOIN WITH HIM IN SUCH AN  
ANTI-COMMUNIST COALITION IF DETAILS COULD BE SATISFACTORILY WORKED OUT.  
THEY WOULD PARTICIPATE INDIVIDUALLY RATHER THAN AS AN QUANG OR NRF  
DEPUTIES. NEVERTHELESS, TUYEN THOUGHT THIS COULD ASSURE A REPRESENTATION  
BY THE BUDDHIST COMMUNITY IN SUCH A COALITION.

16. COMMENT: THERE IS ROOM FOR DOUBT AS TO WHETHER PRESIDENT THIEU  
WISHES REALLY TO BROADEN HIS GOVERNMENT. HE NAMED PRIME MINISTER  
KHIEM TO HEAD THE NEW CAMINET WITHOUT PRIOR DISCUSSION WITH THE  
POTENTIAL MEMBERS OF SUCH A CABINET. IN HIS SPEECH ON MARCH 26, HE  
FURTHER SPIKE BLUNTLY OF THE NON-COMPROMISING AND MILITANT QUALITIES  
WHICH HE WOULD ###

### NOT CONDUCTIVE TO HARMONIOUS B  
ARGAINING WITH  
THE RADICAL OPPOSITION. ON THE NIGHT OF MARCH 26 NATIONAL POLICE  
ARRESTED 10 INDIVIDUALS FOR PLOTTING A COUP. TWO OF THESE HAD BEEN AT  
THE OPPOSITION MEETING THAT AFTERNOON AND SEVERAL WERE KNOWN  
AS FORMER ASSOCIATES OF GENERAL KY. THESE ARRESTS COMING AFTER HIS  
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MARCH 26 MEETING IMMEDIATELY SUGGESTED TO GEN KY THAT AN ATTEMPT WAS  
BEING MADE TO PUT PRESSURE ON HIM AND ON THE OPPOSITION GENERALLY. DR

DO, HOWEVER, NOTED THAT ONLY TWO OF THOSE ARRESTED WERE AT THE  
MEETING AND IT WAS TOO EARLY TO EVALUATE SIGNIFICANCE OF  
ARRESTS. HE ADDED, "I HOPE THAT PRESIDENT THIEU IS NOT  
ATTEMPTING TO INTIMIDATE US."

17. ON THE OPPOSITION SIDE, THERE ALSO SEEMS LITTLE ROOM FOR COMPROMI

SE

IF THE PRESIDENT INSISTS ON RETENTION OF PRIME MINISTER KHIEM. IF DIFFERENCES OVER THE PRIME MINISTER CAN BE OVERCOME, HOWEVER, SOME COMPROMISES MAY BE POSSIBLE. DEPUTY TUYEN'S DEMAND FOR A FIGUREHEAD PRESIDENT PROBABLY REFLECTS IN AN EXTREME FORM THE MORE MODERATE EXPRESSION BY DR. DO THAT IT WOULD NOT BE ACCEPTABLE FOR A CABINET OF NATIONAL UNION TO SIMPLY SERVE AS A RUBBER STAMP FOR PRES THIEU. WITH RESPECT TO A THIRD TERM, DANG VAN SUNG PUT IT RATHER SUCCINCTLY, "I DON'T GIVE A DAMN ABOUT A THIRD TERM. WE HAVE TO GET THROUGH THE NEXT FEW MONTHS." THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THE PRESIDENT SHOULD RUN AGAIN IN OCTOBER WAS DEBATED AT THE MARCH 26 MEETING AND THE EFFORT TO INCLUDE IN THE FINAL RESOLUTION A DEMAND THAT PRESIDENT THIEU RENOUNCE SUCH AN INTENTION WAS VOTED DOWN.

18. WHATEVER OPPOSITION REASON FOR MEETING WITH GENERAL KY, THE MEETING IS BOUND TO MAKE A DELICATE NEGOTIATION EVEN MORE DIFFICULT.

19. TWO OF ORIGINAL GROUP OF MODERATES PRESSING FOR A BROADER GOVERNMENT, TRAN QUOC BUU AND BUI DIEM ARE PRESENTLY IN U.S. AND CAN BE EXPECTED LEND THEIR WEIGHT TO MODERATION AND COMPROMISE ON THEIR RETURN.

20. SEVERAL OPPOSITIONISTS INCLUDING DR. DO AND DEPUTY TUYEN HAVE EXPRESSED GREAT CONCERN THAT THESE NEGOTIATIONS SHOULD BE SUCCESSFUL. IF THEY ARE NOT, THEY SAY, THERE ARE NUMEROUS ANGRY AND IMPATIENT YPUNG MILITARY OFFICERS WHO ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO RESTRAIN FROM ATTEMPTING A MILITARY COUP.

21. IN SUM, THE SIGNALS ARE MIXED AND THE OUTLOOK BESET WITH DIFFICULTY, BUT NOT COMPLETELY WITHOUT HOPE FOR PROGRESS.

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NOTE BY OCT: ### OMISSIONS; CORRECTION TO FOLLOW.

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